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ROMANS 7

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

UBS[4]	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
An Analogy from Marriage	Freed From the Law	An Analogy from Marriage	An Illustration from Marriage	The Christian Is Freed from Slavery to the Law
7:1-6	7:1-6	7:1-3	7:1-6	7:1-6
		7:4-6		
The Problem of Indwelling Sin	Sin's Advantage in the Law	The Law and Sin	Law and Sin	The Function of the Law
7:7-12	7:7-12	7:7-12	7:7-11	7:7-8
				7:9-11
	Law Cannot Save from Sin		7:12-13	7:12-13
7:13-25	7:13-25	7:13		
		The Inner Conflict	The Conflict in Man	The Inward Struggle
		7:14-20	7:14-20	7:14-20
		7:21-25a	7:21-25a	7:21-23
				7:24-25a
		7:25b	7:25b	7:25b

READING CYCLE THREE (see "Bible Interpretation Seminar")
FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects (reading cycle #3). Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS ON VERSES 1-6

A. Romans 7 must be contextually interpreted in light of
   1. Rom. 3:20,21-31; 4:13-16; 5:20
   2. Romans 6
   3. especially Rom. 7:12-14

B. It might be related to the tension in the church of Rome between believing Gentiles and believing Jews, which is also seen in Romans 9-11.
   The exact nature of the problem is uncertain; it may have been
   1. legalism based on The Mosaic Law
   2. Judaizers' emphasis on Moses first, then Christ
   3. misunderstanding of how the gospel applies to Jews
   4. misunderstanding of the relationship between the Old and New Covenants
   5. jealousy of believing Jewish leadership in the church having been replaced by believing Gentile leadership during Nero's edict, which stopped all Jewish rituals in Rome. Many believing Jews may have left also (i.e., Aquila and Priscilla)

C. Romans 7:1-6 continues the figurative language of Romans 6 about the Christians' relationship to their old lives. The imagery used:
   1. death and release from slavery to another master (Romans 6)
   2. death and release from marriage obligations (Romans 7)

D. Romans 6 and 7:1-6 are in literary parallel; Romans 6 deals with the believer's relationship to "sin," while Romans 7 deals with the believer's relationship to "law." The analogy of death freeing a slave (6:12-23) is paralleled by death freeing the marriage bond (Rom. 7:1-6).

Romans 6	**Romans 7**
6:1 "sin"	**7:1** "law"
6:2 "died to sin"	**7:4** "died to law"
6:4 "that we might walk in newness of life"	**7:6** "that we might serve in newness of spirit"
6:7 "he who has died is freed from sin"	**7:6** "we have been freed from the law having died to that wherein we were held"
6:18 "having been set free from sin"	**7:3** "free from the law"

(chart taken from Anders Nygren's *Commentary on Romans*, translated by Carl C. Rassmussen, p. 268)

E. The Law with its decrees was a death sentence. All humans stand condemned under the Law (cf. Gal. 3:13; 4:5; Eph. 2:15; Col. 2:14). The Mosaic Law became a curse!
   SPECIAL TOPIC: PAUL'S VIEWS OF THE MOSAIC LAW
   For a good list of how Paul uses this term, see Rom. 9:2, last paragraph.

F. There have been four major theories about how to interpret Romans 7 (see Contextual Insights for Rom. 7:7-25)
   1. Paul is speaking of himself (autobiographical)
   2. Paul is speaking as a representative of all mankind (representative)
   3. Paul is speaking of Adam's experience (Theodore of Mopsuetia)
   4. Paul is speaking of Israel's experience

G. In many ways Romans 7:1-6 functions like Genesis 3. It shows the downward pull of rebellion even to those who are acquainted with God. Knowledge cannot free fallen humanity; only God's grace, only a new heart, a new mind, and a new spirit can do that (the

New Covenant, cf. Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:26-27). And even then, there is an ongoing spiritual struggle (cf. Rom. 6:12,19; 1 Cor. 6:10-19; Eph. 6:10-18)!

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: ROMANS 7:1-3

[1]Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? [2]For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. [3]So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man.

7:1 "(for I am speaking to those who know the law)" This could refer to

1. believing Jews only
2. the conflict between believing Jews and Gentiles in the Roman church
3. law in a general sense as innate to all mankind (cf. Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:19-20; 2:14-15)
4. to new Gentile believers involved in learning about their new faith (catechism, Rom. 6:17) from the OT Scriptures

▣ **"the law"** This is the main thrust of the chapter (cf. Rom. 7:1,2,4,5,6, etc). However, Paul used the term in several different senses.

1. natural law
2. Mosaic Law
3. societal norms

It seems that Paul's discussion was triggered by Rom. 6:14. His presentation is parallel to the structure of Romans 6. See Contextual Insights, D. The Mosaic Law and its relationship to the New Covenant in Christ is also discussed in Rom. 3:21-31 and 4:13-16.

▣

NASB	**"that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives"**
NKJV	**"that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives"**
NRSV	**"that the law is binding on a person only during that person's lifetime"**
TEV	**"The law rules over a man only as long as he lives"**
NJB	**"that laws affect a person only during his lifetime"**
REB	**"that a person is subject to the law only so long as he is alive"**
Peshitta	**"that the law has authority over a person as long as he lives"**

This is literally "lord it over" (*kurieuō*, cf. Rom. 6:9,14). The Mosaic Law was both a great blessing (cf. Ps. 19; 119), and a horrible curse (cf. Gal. 3:13; Eph. 2:15; Col. 2:14). With physical death, obligations to the Law cease. This is the same imagery used in Romans 6 concerning the believer's death to sin.

7:2 "for the married woman" This is Paul's major illustration in Rom. 7:1-6. In Romans 6 he picked up on death ending a person's obligation as a slave. Here, marriage and its obligations is the focus. The illustration is inverted because it is the husband who died so that the widow could remarry, whereas in Paul's analogy, it is the believer who died and, therefore, is alive to God.

▣ **"she is released"** This is the same VERB as in Rom. 6:6; it means "made inoperative," "to render useless," or "to be done away with." In Rom. 6:6, it was in the AORIST PASSIVE, here it is

PERFECT PASSIVE, meaning "has been and continues to be released."

SPECIAL TOPIC: NULL AND VOID

7:3 "she shall be called an adulteress" This comment is related to the Jewish argument between the rabbinical schools of Shammai and Hillel over Deut. 24:1-4; particularly "some indecency." The Hillel school was the liberal group that would allow divorce for any reason. The Shammai school was the conservative group that would allow divorce only for adultery or some other sexual impropriety (cf. Matt. 5:32; 19:9).

SPECIAL TOPIC: CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: ROMANS 7:4-6

[4]Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. [5]For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were *aroused* by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. [6]But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.

7:4 "you also were made to die" This is the main thrust of this paragraph (and Romans 6). It related to the analogy in Romans 6 of Christians dying to sin because they are "co-buried" (Rom. 6:4) and "co-crucified" (Rom. 6:6) with Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 5:14-15; Gal. 2:20). Believers are new creatures in Christ (see full note at Rom. 6:4), in this new age of the Spirit (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). Baptism marked the boundary between the old age, old man, and the new age, new man.

▣ **"through the body of Christ"** This is not referring to the theological concept of the church as the body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12,27), but to Christ's physical body as in Rom. 6:3-11 where, when Christ died, believers, by way of identification through baptism, died with Him. His death was their death (cf. 2 Cor. 5:14-15; Gal. 2:20). His resurrected life freed them to serve God and others.

▣ **"that we might bear fruit for God"** This was also parallel to Romans 6, especially 6:22 (cf. Matt. 13:1-23). Believers are now free through Christ to bind themselves to Christ. This continues the marriage analogy. As Christ died for believers, they now must die to sin (2 Cor. 5:13-14; Gal. 2:20). As Christ was raised, they, too, are raised to new spiritual life of service to God (cf. Rom. 6:22; Eph. 2:5-6) and each other (cf. 1 John 3:16).

7:5	
NASB	**"For while we were in the flesh"**
NKJV, Peshitta	**"For when we were in the flesh"**
NRSV	**"While we were living in the flesh"**
TEV	**"For when we lived according to our human nature"**
NJB	**"Before our conversion"**
REB	**"While we lived on the level of mere human nature"**

This verse is a contrast to Rom. 7:4. Verse 4 relates to the experience of a believer, as does Rom. 7:6. Verse 5 described the "fruit" of the life without God's power (Gal. 5:18-24.) The Law shows believers their sin (Rom. 7:7-9; Gal. 3:23-25), but cannot give them the power to overcome it.

In context this phrase is referring to believers' fallen, sinful nature inherited from Adam (cf. Rom. 6:19). Paul uses this term *sarx* in two different ways (1) sin nature (the old man) and (2) physical body (cf. Rom. 1:3; 4:1; 9:3,5). Here it is negative, but notice Rom. 1:3; 4:1; 9:3,5; Gal. 2:20. The flesh/body (*sarx/soma*) is not evil in and of itself, but it, like the mind (*nous*), is the battleground, the place of confrontation between evil forces of this age and the Holy Spirit. Paul uses this term in a way consistent with the Septuagint, not Greek literature. Remember the authors of the NT were Hebrew thinkers, writing in Koine Greek, which was influenced by the Septuagint translation of the OT.

SPECIAL TOPIC: FLESH (*SARX*)

▣ **"which were *aroused* by the Law"** This aspect of rebellious human nature, which reacts aggressively to any restrictions, is clearly seen in Genesis 3 and in all humans. The Law set boundaries (cf. Rom. 7:7-8). These divinely-given boundaries were for mankind's protection, but humans viewed them as chains and limits. The sinful, independent spirit was stimulated by God's Law. The problem was not the limits (i.e., law, cf. Rom. 7:12-13), but human autonomy and self will.

SPECIAL TOPIC: PAUL'S VIEWS OF THE MOSAIC LAW

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE FALL OF MANKIND

▣ **"to bear fruit for death"** What a stark contrast between

1. Rom. 7:5 – bear fruit for God
2. Rom. 7:6 – bear fruit for death

Believers have died to sin (i.e., Romans 7) and the Law and now they live to bear fruit for the Kingdom (i.e., Matt. 13:1-23)! Paul paints in black and white (or better paradoxical categories, see note at Rom. 8:2). A person is part of one of two groups—Adam or Jesus (cf. Rom. 5:12-21). Those in Jesus are free, unbound, and new creations (cf. Gal. 2:19-20)! Walk in it! Revel in it!

7:6 "But now" Newman and Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Romans* from UBS, have an interesting comment.

> "It is important to notice the parallels between verses 5 and 6, and at the same time their relation to what follows. Verse 5 describes the pre-Christian experience, and has its parallel in 7.7-25; verse 6 describes the present life of faith under the leadership of God's Spirit, and has its parallel in 8.1-11" (p. 130).

This theological understanding lays the basis for seeing Romans 7 as relating to a person before salvation and after salvation!

▣ **"we have been released"** This is an AORIST PASSIVE INDICATIVE. This is a contrast with the IMPERFECT MIDDLE INDICATIVE ("were aroused," lit. "operated") of Rom. 7:5. Believers had been continually held by sin as revealed in the Law, but now they have been freed by the Spirit through the good news of the gospel. This same word is used of the woman whose husband dies in Rom. 7:2.

▣ **"having died to that by which we were bound"** This is an AORIST ACTIVE PARTICIPLE followed by an IMPERFECT PASSIVE INDICATIVE. God set believers free through Christ's death from

1. the curse of the OT
2. their inner sinful selves

They had been continually bound by their rebellion against God's revealed will, fallen nature, personal sin, and supernatural temptation (cf. Eph. 2:2-3)! But now through faith in Christ, they were no longer bound!

▣ **"newness. . .oldness"** This new spiritual way seems to refer to the New Covenant (cf. Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-32). The Greek term "new" (*kainos* - *kainotēs*) is used by Paul of

1. the newness of life, Rom 6:4 (see full note at Rom. 6:4)
2. the newness of the Spirit, Rom. 7:6
3. the new covenant, 1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Cor. 3:6
4. the new creation, 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15
5. the new man, Eph. 2:15; 4:24

The term "old" applies to the Mosaic Law and meant "totally worn out." Paul is contrasting the Old covenant and the New covenant (cf. Rom. 8:7 and 13), as does the author of Hebrews.

SPECIAL TOPIC: PAUL'S VIEWS OF THE MOSAIC LAW

▣

NASB, NKJV	**"so that we serve in newness of the Spirit"**
NRSV	**"so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit"**
TEV	**"but in the new way of the Spirit"**
NJB	**"free to serve in the new spiritual way"**
REB	**"the way of the spirit"**
Peshitta	**"in newness of spirit"**

This is literally "in newness of spirit." It is uncertain whether this referred to the regenerated human spirit or the Holy Spirit. Most English translations capitalize it, which implies the Holy Spirit, who is mentioned for the first time in Romans 8 (15 times). The term "spirit" could refer to the human spirit regenerated and energized by the gospel and the Spirit (cf. Rom. 1:4,9; 2:29; 7:6; 8:15; 11:8; 12:11; 1 Cor. 2:11; 4:21; 5:3,4,5; 7:34; 14:15,16,32; 16:18).

In Paul's writings "flesh" and "spirit" are often contrasted as two distinct ways of thinking and living (cf. Rom. 7:14; 8:4; Gal. 3:3; 5:16,17,25; 6:8). Physical life without God is "flesh," but life with God is "spirit" or "Spirit." The indwelling Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:9,11) transforms the believer into a new creature in Christ (positionally and experientially).

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE PERSONHOOD OF THE SPIRIT

SPECIAL TOPIC: SPIRIT IN THE BIBLE

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS ON ROMANS 7:7-25

A. Romans 7:7-25 expresses a human reality. All human beings, both saved and lost, have experienced the tension of good and evil in their world and in their own hearts and minds. The hermeneutical question is, "How did Paul mean this passage to be understood?" It must be related contextually to Rom. 1:18-6:23 and 8:1-39.
   1. Some see it as focusing on all human beings and, therefore, see Paul's personal experience as a paradigm. This interpretation is called "the autobiographical theory."
   2. Paul used "I" in a non-personal sense in 1 Cor. 13:1-3. This use of a non-personal "I" can also be documented from the Jewish rabbis. If this is true here, this passage would refer to mankind's transition from innocence through conviction to salvation (Romans 8) "the representative theory" (i.e., *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 312).
   3. However, others have seen these verses as relating to the terrible continuing struggle of a believer with the fallen human nature (i.e., Chrysostom, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Karl Barth). The heart-rending cry of Rom. 7:24 expresses this inner tension. The AORIST and IMPERFECT VERB TENSES dominate Rom. 7:7-13, while the PRESENT and PERFECT VERB TENSES dominate Rom. 7:14-25. This seems to lend credence to "the autobiographical theory" that Paul is describing

his own experience from innocence, to conviction, to justification and the tension-filled road of progressive sanctification (cf. *autos egō*, "I myself," cf. Rom. 7:25).

4. It is just possible that both views are true. In Rom. 7:7-13 and 25b Paul is speaking autobiographically, while in Rom. 7:14-25a, he is speaking of his experience of inner struggle with sin, as representative of all redeemed humanity. However, it must be remembered that this entire passage also must be seen against the backdrop of Paul as a committed Jewish religionist before regeneration. Paul's experience was uniquely his.

B. The Law is good. It is from God. It served, and continues to serve, a divine purpose (cf. Rom. 7:7, 12, 14, 22, 25; Matt. 5:17-19). It cannot bring peace or salvation (cf. Galatians 3). James Stewart in his book *A Man in Christ*, shows Paul's paradoxical thinking and writing:

> "You would naturally expect a man who was setting himself to construct a system of thought and doctrine to fix as rigidly as possible the meanings of the terms he employed. You would expect him to aim at precision in the phraseology of his leading ideas. You would demand that a word, once used by your writer in a particular sense should bear that sense throughout. But to look for this from Paul is to be disappointed. Much of his phraseology is fluid, not rigid. . .'The law is holy,' he writes, 'I delight in the law of God after the inward man' (cf. Rom. 7:12-13) but it is clearly another aspect of *nomos* that makes him say elsewhere, 'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law (cf. Gal. 3:13)'" (p. 26).

C. The textual evidence dealing with the question, "Is Paul referring to a saved or unsaved person in Rom. 7:14-25?" is as follows

1. Unsaved person
   a. This was the interpretation of the early Greek speaking church Fathers
   b. The following phrases support this view
      (1) "I am of flesh," Rom. 7:14
      (2) "sold into bondage to sin," Rom. 7:14
      (3) "nothing good dwells in me," Rom. 7:18
      (4) "making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members," Rom. 7:23
      (5) "wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" Rom. 7:24
   c. The immediate context of Romans 6 is that believers have been freed from the mastery of sin. The context of chap. 8 starts with "so then."
   d. The absence of any reference to the Spirit or Christ until the close of this context (Rom. 7:25).
2. Saved person
   a. This was the interpretation of Augustine, Calvin, and the Reformed tradition
   b. The following phrases support this view
      (1) "we know that the Law is spiritual," Rom. 7:14
      (2) "I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good," Rom. 7:16
      (3) "the good that I wish, I do not do. . .," Rom. 7:19
      (4) "I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man," Rom. 7:22
   c. The larger literary context of Romans 5-8 places Romans 7 in the section dealing with sanctification.
   d. The obvious change of verb tenses from IMPERFECT and AORISTS in Rom. 7:7-13 to the consistent use of the PRESENT TENSE in Rom. 7:14-24 imply a different and new section of Paul's life (i.e., conversion).

D. The more a believer strives toward Christlikeness, the more he experiences his/her own sinfulness. This paradox fits well this context and the personality of Paul (and, for that matter, most believers; for an opposite view see Gordon Fee, *Paul, The Spirit, and the People of God*). A line from a Lutheran hymn by Henry Twells:

"And none, O Lord, has perfect rest,
For none is wholly free from sin;
And they who faint would serve Thee best
Are conscious most of wrong within."

I think Paul was struggling with his Pharisaic past which gave a structure to his presentation of "Law" and "sin/death." However, I am also impacted by my own struggle with temptation and sin after salvation. It has surely colored my interpretation. I think Gordon Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*, represents another valid Christian's experience and perspective. One thing I know, there is an ongoing tension or conflict between

1. old age – new age
2. old man – new man
3. law – spirit

This tension has been dealt with in Christ! Victory is ours. Never focus on Romans 7 without reading carefully Romans 6 and 8. Victory is ours in Him!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: ROMANS 7:7-12

[7]What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET." [8]But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead. [9]I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; [10]and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; [11]for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. [12]So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

7:7 "What shall we say then" Paul is returning to his use of diatribe (cf. Rom. 6:1,15; 7:1,13).

▣ **"Is the Law sin"** One of the paradoxes of revelation is that God used the holiness and goodness of the Law as a mirror to reveal sin, so as to bring fallen mankind to the place of repentance and faith (cf. Rom. 3:20; 4:15; 5:20; Gal. 3:14-29). Also surprisingly the Mosaic Law continues to function in sanctification but not in justification

SPECIAL TOPIC: PAUL'S VIEWS OF THE MOSAIC LAW

▣ **"May it never be"** Paul's characteristic OPTATIVE MOOD rejection of a false assertion (see notes at Rom. 3:4,6,31; 6:2,15; 7:7,13; 9:14; 11:1,11; Gal. 2:17; 3:21).

▣ **"on the contrary"** Paul's literary style in Romans uses strong contrasts to make his points (cf. Rom. 3:4,6,31; 6:2,15; 7:13; 9:14; 11:1,11).

▣ **"I"** Mark in your Bible the number of times the FIRST PERSON PRONOUNS "I," "my," or "me" appear in the context of Rom. 7:7-25. It will amaze you. It is something over forty times.

▣ **"I would not have come to know sin except through the Law"** This is one of the key passages which reveal the concept of the Mosaic Law functioning as a mirror to reveal personal sin

(cf. Rom. 3:20; 4:15; 5:20; Gal. 3:14-29, especially Rom. 7:24). To break the Law one time was to break the Covenant and, thereby, to bear its consequences (cf. Rom. 7:10 and James 2:10)!

▣ **"except through the Law"** This is a SECOND CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE which is called "contrary to fact." Paul was convicted of sin. This is the only example of this grammatical feature in Romans. Paul does use it in Gal. 1:10; 3:21, as well as 1 Cor. 2:8; 5:10; 11:31; and 2 Cor. 12:11.

SPECIAL TOPIC: GREEK GRAMMATICAL TERMS, VII

▣ **"YOU SHALL NOT COVET"** This is a quote of the last command of the Ten Commandments (cf. Exod. 20:17; Deut. 5:21). This last commandment focuses on proper attitude, which is really the essence of them all (cf. Matthew 5-7).

The Law is often referred to as "the commandment" (cf. Rom. 7:8,9,11,12,13).

The term "covet" meant "to set one's heart on" or "to desire strongly." God has given humans (lost and saved) many good things through creation, but humans tend to take God's gifts beyond the God-given bounds. "More-and-more for me at any cost" becomes their motto! Self is a terrible tyrant!

SPECIAL TOPIC: COVET

7:8

NASB, NKJV	**"taking opportunity"**
NRSV	**"seizing an opportunity"**
TEV	**"found its chance"**
NJB	**"took advantage of"**
REB	**"found its opportunity"**
Peshitta	**"found an occasion"**

This was a military term that was used of a beach-head or base of operations (cf. Rom. 7:8 and 11). It is personalized in this context (cf. Rom. 7:9,11). Sin was characterized as a military operation led by a military leader (cf. Rom. 7:11,17; Rom. 6:12, 14, 16).

▣ **"for apart from the Law sin is dead"** Sin is rebellion against God's will (cf. Rom. 4:15; 5:13; 1 Cor. 15:56). There is no VERB in this phrase; one must be supplied. If one supplies a PRESENT TENSE, it implies that this is a universal principle. If one supplies an AORIST TENSE, it referred to Paul's life specifically.

7:9 "I was once alive" This could refer to Paul as

1. a child during the age of innocence (i.e., before *Bar Mitzvah* at age 13)
2. as a committed Pharisee before the truth of the gospel broke into his heart (cf. Acts 23:1; Phil. 3:6; 2 Tim. 1:3)

The first represents "the autobiographical theory" of interpretation of Romans 7 and the second "the representative theory" of interpretation of Romans 7. See Contextual Insights.

▣ **"when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died"** Mankind's rebellious spirit is energized by prohibitions. The "do not" of God's Law triggers the self-directing pride of fallen humanity (cf. Gen. 2:16-17; 3:1-6). Notice how sin continues to be personified, as in Rom. 5:21; 6:12,14,16; 7:8,11,17,20.

7:10 "the commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me" This is probably a reference to the promise of Lev. 18:5; Deut. 4:1; 30:15,19; or possibly Rom. 2:13. The Law promised what it could not fulfill, not because it was sinful, but because humanity is weak and rebellious. The Law became a death sentence (cf. Gal. 3:13; Eph. 2:15; Col. 2:14).

7:11 "deceived me and through it killed me" These are both AORIST ACTIVE INDICATIVE VERBS. This term, "deceived," is used of the serpent deceiving Eve in the Septuagint (LXX) of Gen. 3:13. Paul uses this VERB several times (cf. Rom. 16:18; 1 Cor. 3:18; 2 Cor. 11:3; 2 Thess. 2:3; 1 Tim. 2:14). Adam and Eve's problem was also coveting (cf. 2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:14). Adam and Eve died spiritually by disobeying God's command (now revealed in the Law, cf. 1 Cor. 15:56), and so did Paul and so do all humans (Rom. 1:18-3:20).

7:12 This is Paul's affirmation of the goodness of the Law. It is not the problem. However Paul's parallel structure, using "sin" in Romans 6 and "law" in Romans 7, must have upset the legalistic Jewish believers (the weak of Rom. 14:1-15:13) in the Roman church.

SPECIAL TOPIC: PAUL'S VIEWS OF THE MOSAIC LAW

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: ROMANS 7:13

[13]Therefore did that which is good become *a cause of* death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.

7:13	
NASB	**"sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin...sin might become utterly sinful"**
NKJV	**"sin, that it might appear sin...might become exceedingly sinful"**
NRSV	**"that sin might be shown to be sin...sinful beyond measure"**
TEV	**"in order that its true nature as sin might be revealed"**
NJB	**"sin, to show itself in its true colors...was able to exercise all its sinful power"**
REB	**"thereby sin exposed its true character...sin became more sinful than ever"**
Peshitta	**"sin that is exposed as sin...will be more condemned"**

Sin's evil nature is clearly seen in the fact that it took something as good, wholesome, and godly as the Mosaic Law (cf. Ps. 19, 119) and twisted it into an instrument of condemnation and death (cf. Eph. 2:15; Col. 2:14). Fallen mankind has taken every good gift God has given beyond its God-given bounds!

Notice the two *hina* (purpose) clauses translated "in order that" and "so that." PREPOSITIONS clarify the author's purpose!

▣ **"utterly sinful"** Sin is personified to show the personal nature of evil.

SPECIAL TOPIC: PAUL'S USE OF *HUPER* COMPOUNDS

SPECIAL TOPIC: PERSONAL EVIL

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: ROMANS 7:14-20

[14]For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. [15]For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate. [16]But if I do the very thing I do not want *to do*, I agree with the Law, *confessing* that the Law is good. [17]So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. [18]For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my

flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. [19]For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. [20]But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

7:14 "the Law is spiritual" God's Law is good. It is not the problem (cf. Rom. 7:12 and 16b).

▣ **"I am of flesh"** This term is used by Paul in

1. a neutral sense meaning physical body (cf. Rom. 1:3; 2:28; 4:1; 9:3,5; Ps. 103:14)
2. a negative sense meaning mankind's fallen nature in Adam (cf. Rom. 7:5)

It is uncertain which is being referred to here.

SPECIAL TOPIC: FLESH (*SARX*)

▣ **"sold into bondage to sin"** This is a PERFECT PASSIVE PARTICIPLE meaning "I have been and continue to be sold into bondage to sin." Sin is again personified, here as a slave owner. The agent of the PASSIVE VOICE is uncertain. It could refer to Satan, sin, Paul, or God.

In the OT the major term for God drawing mankind back to Himself was "ransom" or "redeem" (and their synonyms). It originally meant "to buy back" (and its synonyms). The opposite concept is the phrase used here, "sold into the hands of. . ." (cf. Jdgs. 4:2; 10:7; 1 Sam. 12:9).

SPECIAL TOPIC: RANSOM/REDEEM

7:15-24 The child of God has "the divine nature" (cf. 2 Pet. 1:4), but also the fallen nature (cf. Gal. 5:17). Potentially, sin is made inoperative (cf. Rom. 6:6), but human experience follows Romans 7. The Jews say that in every man's heart is a black and a white dog. The one he feeds the most is the one that becomes biggest.

As I read this passage I experientially feel the pain of Paul as he describes the daily conflict of our two natures. Believers have been freed from their fallen nature, but, God help us, we continue to yield to its lure. It is often surprisingly true that the intense spiritual warfare begins after salvation. Maturity is a tension-filled daily fellowship with the Triune God and a daily conflict with evil (cf. Rom. 8:12-25,26; Gal. 5:16-18; Eph. 6:10-18; Col. 3:5-10; see J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*).

7:16,20 "if" These are both FIRST CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCES, which are viewed as true from the author's perspective or for his literary purposes.

7:16 "The Law is good" See full note at Rom. 7:14.

SPECIAL TOPIC: PAUL'S VIEWS OF THE MOSAIC LAW

7:18 "I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh" Paul is not asserting that the physical body is evil, but that it was the battle ground between the fallen nature and God's Spirit. The Greeks held that the body, along with all matter, was evil. This developed into the dualistic heresy of Gnosticism (cf. Ephesians, Colossians and 1 John). The Greeks tended to blame "the physical" for spiritual problems. Paul does not view the spiritual conflict in these terms. He personified sin and used mankind's rebellion against God's Law as the opportunity for evil's invasion of human nature.

The term "flesh" in Paul's writings can mean

1. the physical body which is morally neutral (cf. Rom. 1:3; 2:28; 4:1; 9:3,5)
2. the fallen sin nature inherited from Adam (cf. Rom. 7:5)

SPECIAL TOPIC: GNOSTICISM

SPECIAL TOPIC: FLESH (*SARX*)

7:20 "sin which dwells in me" It is interesting that the book of Romans so clearly shows humanity's sin, but there is no mention of Satan until Rom. 16:20. Humans cannot blame Satan for their sin problem. We have a choice. Sin is personified as a king, tyrant, and slave owner. It tempts and lures us to independence from God, to self assertion at any cost. Paul's personification of sin linked to human choice reflects Gen. 4:7.

Paul uses the term "dwells" several times in this chapter (cf. Rom. 7:17,18,20). The sin nature is not destroyed or removed at salvation, but made potentially inoperative. Its continuing powerlessness depends on our cooperation with the indwelling Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:9,11). God has provided for believers all that is necessary to combat personified (literary) and personal (Satan and the demonic) evil. It is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. As we accept God's free gift of salvation, so too, we must accept God's gift of the effective deterrent of the Holy Spirit. Salvation and the Christian life are a daily process that begins and ends with believers' daily decisions. God has provided all that we need:

1. the Spirit (Romans 8)
2. spiritual armor (Eph. 6:11)
3. revelation (Eph. 6:17)
4. prayer (Eph. 6:18)
5. fellowship of other believers

The battle is fierce (Romans 7), but the battle is won (Romans 8).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: ROMANS 7:21-25

21I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. 22For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, 23but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. 24Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? 25Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

7:22 "the law of God" For the Jews this referred to the Law of Moses. For the non-Jew this referred to

1. the witness of nature (cf. Rom. 1:19-20; Ps. 19:1-6)
2. the inner-moral conscience (cf. Rom. 2:14-15)
3. societal norms or mores

▣

NASB, Peshitta	**"in the inner man"**
NKJV	**"according to the inward man"**
NRSV, NJB, REB	**"in my inmost self"**
TEV	**"my inner being"**

Paul contrasts the outer man (physical) with the inner man (spiritual) in 2 Cor. 4:16. In this context the phrase refers to that part of Paul or saved humanity that affirms God's will and law.

1. "the Law is spiritual," Rom. 7:14
2. "what I would like to do," Rom. 7:15
3. "I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good," Rom. 7:16
4. "the wishing is present in me," Rom. 7:18
5. "the good that I want," Rom. 7:19
6. "I produce the very evil that I do not want," Rom. 7:19
7. "I am doing the very thing I do not want," Rom. 7:20

8. "the one who wants to do good," Rom. 7:21
9. "I joyfully concur with the Law of God," Rom. 7:22
10. "the law of my mind," Rom. 7:23
11. "I myself with my mind am serving the law of God," Rom. 7:25

Romans 7 shows that knowledge of God and His word are not enough. Believers need the Spirit (Romans 8)!

7:23 There is a real contrast between Rom. 6:2; 8:2 and 7:23. This verse clearly shows Paul's use of law (*nomos*) to refer to

1. the law of sin (cf. Rom. 7:21,25)
2. the law of God (cf. Rom. 7:22, 25)
3. earlier in Rom. 7:4,5,6,7,9 and 12 Paul used the term for the OT

Paul was not a systematic theologian. He struggled with the concept of "law." In one sense it was God's revelation, a wonderful gift to mankind, yet in another it was that which defined sin and clearly set boundaries that fallen mankind was unable to keep. These boundaries were not only OT revelation (cf. Ps. 19:7-14; 119, but all moral guidelines: natural revelation (cf. Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:18-3:31) or social mores and norms. Humans are rebels who want to be in complete control of their own lives!

SPECIAL TOPIC: PAUL'S VIEWS OF THE MOSAIC LAW

7:24 Can this be a statement from a saved person? Some say no and, therefore, this chapter refers to moral, religious but unredeemed persons. Others say yes, that it refers to the tension of the gospel, "the already and the not yet" in the lives of believers. The eschatological fulfillment has not yet been manifested. The mature believer senses this gap most acutely.

▣

NASB	**"the body of this death"**
NKJV, NRSV	**"this body of death"**
TEV	**"this body that is taking me to death"**
NJB	**"this body doomed to die"**
REB	**"this state of death"**
Peshitta	**"this mortal body"**

The physical body and mind are not evil in and of themselves. They were created by God for life on this planet and fellowship with Him (cf. Gen. 3:8). They were created "very good" (cf. Gen. 1:31). But, Genesis 3 changed mankind and the planet. This is not the world God intended it to be and we are not the people God intended us to be. Sin has radically affected creation. Sin has taken what was good and twisted it into self-centered evil. The body and mind have become the battle ground of temptation and sin. Paul feels the battle acutely! He longs for the new age, the new body, fellowship with God (cf. Rom. 8:23).

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE FALL OF MANKIND

7:25 This is a summary and a transition to the higher ground of Romans 8. However, even in Romans 8 this same tension is seen as in Rom. 7:5-11.

The question for interpreters revolves around of whom is Paul speaking?

1. himself and his experiences within Judaism
2. all Christians
3. Adam as an example of human beings
4. Israel and her knowledge of the Law, but failure to obey it

Personally, I combine #1 (Rom. 7:7-13,25b) and #2 (Rom. 7:14-25a). See Contextual Insights to Rom. 7:7-25. The pain and agony of Romans 7 is matched and surpassed by the majesty of Romans 8!

▣ **"Thanks be to God"** See SPECIAL TOPIC: PAUL'S PRAYER, PRAISE, AND THANKSGIVING

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. How is Romans 6 related to Romans 7?
2. What is the relationship of the Old Testament law to New Testament believers? (cf. 2 Cor. 3:1-11; Heb. 8:7, 13)
3. What two illustrations does Paul use in Romans 6 and 7 to describe our new relationship to our old life?
4. How is the Christian related to the Mosaic Law?
5. Explain in your own words the difference between the autobiographical and representative theories of interpreting Romans 7:7-25.
6. Is Romans 7 a description of a lost person, an immature believer or all believers?

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